

December 2004



MONTANA GEAR UP

GAINING EARLY AWARENESS & READINESS FOR
UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education / Montana University System



Director's Message: by Sandy Merdinger

Last month I had the pleasure of meeting with one of our GEAR UP Pathways scholarship recipients to see how college life is going for him. Scott Flat Lip, a GEAR UP graduate from Chief Plenty Coups High School in Pryor, is attending MSU-Billings College of Technology in the Welding and Metals Fabrication Program. When I asked Scott what the hardest thing is for students in adjusting to college life, without hesitation he replied, "There is no one to tell you to do your homework." He went on to say that in high school he always had teachers and counselors nudging him to stay on track and now it is his responsibility. As far as advice for GEAR UP seniors this year, Scott stated, "Get your paperwork in early!"

Scott enjoys life in the residence hall on the MSU-Billings campus. One of his favorite things about college life is meeting new people. In the small community of Pryor he knew everyone but now he has the opportunity to meet all different kinds of people and he enjoys learning from them. Scott said he sees other students that are afraid to ask for help when they need it. As he said, "It's up to us to go to them," meaning students have to take the initiative to find any help they need. This is probably especially difficult for students from smaller high schools in Montana when they start college at the larger campuses. The state GEAR UP office hopes to provide more information in this area over the coming months in order to support our first large class of GEAR UP cohort students.

Montana GEAR UP will be visiting with and surveying a variety of stakeholders as we begin to work on the application for a new grant. We anticipate that much of this will be done before the application is actually released. The application packet should be available by February 2005. We understand there will be a 60-day turnaround on the application so the next few months will be very busy. With all the extra work in store, I am happy to announce Cyrus Malkin was selected as the new GEAR UP Administrative Associate and will begin December 13. In the meantime, I wish you all the best for the holidays!



Scott Flat Lip demonstrating new skills he has learned in college.

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Advisory Committee Meeting Report:

The Advisory Committee to the GEAR UP program met in Helena on December 1-2 for a work session to provide information that will be used as the new grant is crafted. Committee members were given a list of questions meant to generate discussion prior to the meeting and were asked to keep the big picture in mind. State staff was specifically interested in best practices that have taken place in the field that should be replicated or enhanced in the future as well as aspects of the current grant that need improvement. The committee was also asked to provide input on areas of the current program they feel should be discontinued, what gaps in service a new program should tackle, ideas on how to roll out a new program and include new schools, credible strategies for sustainability and other areas for improvement. This was the first of several meetings that will be held with stakeholders to gather information for writing the next grant.

The GEAR UP Spotlight: Brady and St. Ignatius

Brady: Armed with buckets, mega soakers and more, the Brady GEAR UP program had its third annual float trip down the Missouri River on Tuesday, October 5, 2005. The rafts, canoes and kayaks were launched at Craig and taken out seven miles down river at Mid Canyon after an exciting float. Parents were invited to accompany the school staff and students and the curriculum for the day was incorporated into the float. It was a warm, sunny day full of learning, water fights, strategy techniques and fun!

St. Ignatius: On Wednesday, November 10, St. Ignatius High School hosted its annual Career Day. Representatives from various career fields, colleges, and the military were in attendance to give students a taste of what to expect, and what is expected, in their respective areas. The St. Ignatius School-To-Work program, SOAR (Systems of Achieving Reality) team, and GEAR UP put on this annual event to give students a broad perspective into careers and post-secondary options. This year, law, criminal investigation, US Forestry, auto body, trucking, pharmacology, and athletic training were just some of the options available for students to explore. The University of Montana and Salish Kootenai College, along with Job Corps, the Montana School of Massage, and the military, were represented in the Career Arena portion of the day. Aaron Mayernik from MGSLP provided high school students with valuable financial aid information. GEAR UP grant manager, Peter Butler, joined the employer's panel to give high school students advice on what prospective employers are looking for from students entering the workforce. Tina Wagner, also from MGSLP, provided middle school students with entertainment and information in regards to college and financial aid.



The entire day is designed to give students a chance to discover what they would like to do or what they would not like to do after high school. As a follow up to the career day, in the spring high school students will take part in college visits to tribal, private, community, and state colleges and universities. These activities will continue to be part of the St. Ignatius School District's plan to give the students roots in their community and the wings to soar in their futures.

November 16-18, Kelly Hert, Federal Program Accountant, conducted information sessions for school clerks, business managers and liaisons in three locations across the state. At all three sites, the feedback was very positive, and it was clear that the schools who attended truly appreciated the opportunity to clear the air and demystify fiscal issues in their local GEAR UP programs.

Fiscal Issues Help Sessions Report:

Topics that Kelly covered included reporting guidelines, allowable expenditures, necessary documentation and match. She also clarified what aspect of reporting was the responsibility of the liaison and what is the responsibility of the clerk or business manager. Each session generated a lot of discussion and Kelly stayed after each session to work with individuals with specific questions regarding their grants.

Schools represented at the trainings include Arrowhead, Bloomfield, Brady, Charlo, Evergreen, Hays, Kila, Pryor, Rocky Boy, St. Ignatius, Wibaux and Winnett. For schools that didn't make it to one of the sessions, materials will be provided and as always, Kelly is always happy to help with schools' fiscal issues.

December Reminders:

- The next Liaison meeting is scheduled for January 31-February 1, 2005 at Chico Hot Springs.
- Mid-term Progress Reports & Mid-term Fiscal Reports are due January 31, 2004.
- Submissions for the 2004-2005 Essay Contest are due March 1, 2005.
- Applications for the GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship are due March 11, 2005.
- Please submit your GEAR UP Spotlight articles by the 20th of the month to be included in following newsletters to Peter Butler at pbutler@oche.montana.edu.
- This newsletter is also available online by visiting <http://gearup.montana.edu/>.
- Please let us know if someone would like to be added to the newsletter distribution list.
- Happy holidays!

The Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship:

On November 26, letters were sent to last year's achievement grant recipients encouraging them to apply for the Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship. This scholarship may be awarded for up to a five-year period with a maximum total amount up to \$20,000. The scholarship amount depends on the cost of the program the student enrolls in and other financial aid they may receive. Recipients may receive up to \$5,000 per year.

The scholarship may be used at any public or private accredited institution in Montana. This includes all units of Montana State University and The University of Montana (including the Colleges of Technology), the seven tribal colleges and three public community colleges, Rocky Mountain College, Carroll College and the University of Great Falls. Proprietary schools are not eligible institutions for using the scholarship.

Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarships will be awarded based upon a variety of factors including: financial need, academic preparation and performance, participation in extra-curricular activities, community service or volunteer projects, the quality of response on the written application, and the quality of the project submitted or described. Up to fifteen scholarships will be awarded this year and notification will be made by April 30, 2005.

Complete instructions and an application checklist were included in the mailing to students. This information was also sent to all liaisons and counselors in GEAR UP schools including copies of the letters that were sent to eligible students. As the addresses we have for your students from last year may no longer be current, please check with your students to make sure they received their letter and encourage them to apply. Because the applicant pool is limited to recipients of GEAR UP Achievement Grants from last year, there are at most only 191 students eligible to apply. That means the odds are good for receiving a very significant scholarship!

If you have any questions about the application process contact Mary Taylor, State Grants Coordinator, at (800) 537-7508 extension 0638 or mtaylor@mgsip.state.mt.us.

College Goal Sunday: 5 fast facts and one good question

Fact #1: Libby Siebens has been hired as the College Goal Sunday Coordinator at the Student Assistance Foundation! Libby can be reached at 406-495-7800. Previously, Libby worked for the Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program.

Fact #2: Student Assistance Foundation is partnering with American Indian Business Leaders to provide outreach and public relations for College Goal Sunday on Montana's Indian Reservations.

Fact #3: College Goal Sunday site coordinator training will be held on December 16th in Great Falls. Contact Libby Siebens or Garth Ferro at 406-495-7800 for more information.

Fact #4: Parents and students can (and should) obtain a personal identification number (PIN) prior to attending College Goal Sunday. PINs are available at www.pin.ed.gov. There is no cost to you to obtain a PIN.

Fact #5: People can use different pieces of financial information to complete the FAFSA. People need to bring tax returns, W-2's, tribal income, other aid-TANF, child support, other benefits, last year's tax return or even last year's ending pay stub.

- Bottom line: you can use estimated income information
- Make sure you have correct SSN numbers and income data

And one good question...

Are parents required to attend College Goal Sunday with their student(s)?

Parent participation is highly recommended. Parent financial information is used to determine eligibility for financial aid, and parents are required to sign the FAFSA before it is submitted. Students attending without their parents will not be turned away, but in most cases, they will probably not be able to complete the form on their own.

Federal Student Aid Satellite Broadcast for Counselors and Mentors: December 9, 2004

Dear counselors and mentors:

The U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid (FSA) office is pleased to announce the Annual Federal Student Aid Training for Counselors and Mentors, a satellite broadcast for high school, TRIO, and GEAR UP counselors and other mentors helping students prepare for postsecondary education.

When is the broadcast?

We will present this live program free of charge on Thursday, December 9, 2004, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

What will the program cover?

The program will consist of two segments, one for students and one for counselors.

The student segment, approximately an hour in length, will feature an introduction to the FSA programs, an overview of the application process, and a discussion of how students can use *Student Aid on the Web*, our interactive information and planning site for students. We encourage you to invite students to watch this part of the program with you.

After the student segment, there will be a short break during which your students may leave your viewing location. The second segment will be aimed specifically at counselors and mentors and will include detailed discussions of the publications, web sites, and networking resources available to help you help your students. During the videoconference, we will provide a toll-free number so you can call with questions, or you can fax or e-mail your questions. We will have subject-matter experts on hand to respond.

What viewing options are available?

You may watch the live broadcast via satellite or join us online through the technology of webcasting. Please use the Internet URL at the bottom of this announcement to find program information including satellite coordinates, instructions on how to register your school as a host site, and how to find a host site in your area.

Is my school allowed to record this videoconference for later viewing?

Yes, please feel free to videotape this program. **In fact, we especially recommend you videotape the student segment for later use in financial aid information programs.**

What if I have other commitments on December 9?

Approximately three weeks after the live program, a limited number of videotapes of the program will be available to borrow from ED Pubs, our publication warehouse. At that time, you may borrow a tape by calling 1-877-4-ED-PUBS (toll free) or ordering online at www.edpubs.org.

We hope you will join us for this important update on the FSA programs.

Please go to our official information and registration site and find out more about the Annual Federal Student Aid Training for Counselors and Mentors:

www.edvideo.walcoff.com

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Montana Guaranteed Student Loan
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National GEAR UP website:
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/gearup/index.html>